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Letter from John G. Manuel to John Muir, 1913 Apr 8.

John G. Manuel

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on stones polished smooth by the tides coming and going. till you reach the edge of the water and tangle. Then at your right is a rocky shelf about 6 feet high and you climb up a slippery face to find up there a deep pool, not very large round, but full of beautiful specimens of sea weed, and clear caller saut water. I feel sure you have been up beside it. I have often wondered how it came to be formed there. I have been home thrice since coming here, and each time I have gone up and visited the sequestered wee hole. Last time I was not so agile as in former days, but I managed it, and sat there ruminating over happier days till I cam near being "lochit in". And should I ever go again I'll try hard to get up to it. And Lord Lauderdales gardens, alas, nearly all gone. Villas built nearly out to the old bowling green, and our beloved

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Natick.
Massachusetts
April 8th 1913.

Dear Mrs Muir -

I ask your pardon for my intrusion into your busy life, but I jist canna help writin'. A friend of mine called my attention to your first article in the Atlantic Monthly, and of course I followed the others up. What constrains me to write is this. It is impossible for an author to realize how much his writings cam sink into those of his readers who understand thoroughly what is written. His articles may be read by thousands, and he may know that they are liked and appreciated, but I think it is rarely he gets a heartfelt response on a par with the feelings that possess his inmost heart when he writes. May I make this a little clearer to you. Your first article seems a perfect description of my own

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boyhood. It may be so, and likely is, of many laddies o' the Guid Auld Toon. But it appeals to me individually, and in a few seconds I was back among the rocks at "Wulkiehaugh" turnin' over the stanes for "partans", saw eels, and at exceptionally low tides "cleekin' troos", and getting dulse. The "Auld Castle" was always a shrine to which my laddie feet turned, and I loved to go up there and look off "East Bye", and then across to the "Wildfire" Tantallon, and the May. Four nights a week, for 5 years would be my average visits to the Castle. Sometimes it would be on the part next to the harbour mouth, looking down on to the "Grips" and watching the yauls come in, and the craft making the Firth. Sometimes it was up on the gunholes, and I'll warrant you mind the narrow footpath

we had to climb up to, and then walk around very carefully into a sort of courtyard, from whence we went up on to the very top with its velvety turf. There there was an underground passage that once ran clear across to the other part, but which had broken off. To the end of that we would go, and look at the water beneath when the tide happened to be in. My earliest visits to the gunholes were of a shaky nature, and I was shy of the walk, so crawled through the nearest gunhole till I got a bit braver. Before I leave the Castle, I want to ask if you mind a certain spot. You mind there are two holes through which the sea comes and runs around a rock at high tide making an island of it, and she a rare place for "scootchers". Well at the one next to the Gun-holes, when the tide is very, very, low, you go down under the arch, treading

foot yonder. It seems too that the call of the pears and apples on the other side of a broken bottle parapeted dyke, has been a seductive one in all ages. Rises now before me an old world garden with quiet walks, and restful silence, at the foot of the back road, opposite Winterfield Mains. Everything there, the high dyke, bottle bottoms, the waiting fruit, and intrepid "pagan's". What a gloriously descriptive appellation. Nothing higher can ever be bestowed on a true Dunbar laddie. When you told about the plays with your Brother after bed-time, and I fell to wondering where you lived. You told of a garden behind, and my fancy pitched out a house on the West side of the High St next to Combe the "cauntlemaker's" kept as a "pig-shop" down stairs by one Sam Harrington in my day. I guessed

tower on Knock-in-hair is incorporated into what is termed a mansion built by the Sirdar of Egypt. Peter Lawson I have heard my Uncle James speak of and also Mungo Siddons. Siddons Society is still to the fore. I suppose you know that, and often have I carried my Masters monthly payment to the wee room in the Corn Exchange. My Uncle used to tell a story about Mr Siddons which I jotted down and will type a copy for you, along with another one when the port of Dunbar was in its glory. My earliest recollection of Dunbar schools is a clear one of the "Charity School" at the South end of Castle Street, between my grandfather's gunsmith's shop, and the foot of the Corn Exchange close. It was taught by Thomas White, father of the present Town-Clerk. I would go in there sometimes, and he would give me words

to spell, and I picked up spelling very readily. And like yourself I was between 3 and 4 years old. That was in 1866-7. Then I have a hazy recollection of a school at the ~~West~~ North end of Castle St close by the Wesleyan Chapel. I think it was known as the infant school, and was presided over by a Miss Beales. But I am not clear on that point. I dont think I ever knew where Mr Liddon's school was. I imagine the school you went to after that, Mr Lyon, was kent in my day as "Dick's schule". You speak of your visit to it in later years, and meeting I presume Mr Dick. He has passed on, also Mr Buchanan the good parish minister who was likely your guide. The school buildings were all enlarged years ago, but I recall the little low square building. Among my late Father's effects, I found a photo of the little building and part of the play-ground

and Keir's boat-building yard, which I have safely laid by. Personally I never attended Dick's school, but was one year at a schol in St Catherines Hall near Keir's house, or at the Woodbush to be more correct. The balance of my education, not much to be sure, but thorough was gotten under George Webster at Westbarns. I recognize the well on the kirk brae under the dyke at the end where the road to the "cottages", Church St, and the Woodbush Brae intersect. All gone for many a year, but I mind fine some o' the wond wells that used to be on the High Street. "Scohin-in-goats". oh how it all comes back. Havent heard the word for years. There used tae be an auful' yin at the Horseshoe. My first experience too of bathing was being dragged screaming into the sea at Belhaven sands close by the burn

or two more about dear little Belhaven. I am enclosing a card of it, lookin' doon the brae toward Westbarns. At the left, the very first house with the railings in front is Hillside Cottage. My first recollection of it was about 1870, when one Mason the baker lived there. He was followed by a Mr Macfarlane, who was once a gamekeeper somewhere. He was a man of retiring disposition, and about all he did was to fish for troots in Westbarns burn. The house is one storey in front, but three on the back, and has a dear old world quiet garden with a high dyke surrounding it. On the side of the front door casing, is an old fashioned bell-pull with a wire running to an old style jingle spring bell in the kitchen. So at times, when the impish spirit held sway, on a dark winter night on

the right side of the street, but a wee bit too far North. Then the name "Gilrye" kept sounding in my ears, and I raxed my brains in vain. So I wrote home to a friend in Leith, we were laddies thegither in Dunbar, ashing about the name. And in answer came this. "Man, div ee no mind the name "Gilrye Place" chiselled in the stane on Sanson's shop yonder at the corner o' the Bank"! And it all came over me like a flash, many a time I have seen the name, but never knew why it was called so. Hereafter I shall never forget it. Your kindly tribute to the "larkies", pleased me greatly. On Saturdays, just as you used to, we would go nesting, up past Eweford plantin, to the cross-roads where one road ran West, past Eweford cottages,

and Thristly Cross to Beltonford. Another road ran up past Bourhouse and Hurkle to Little Spott etc, while another ran East past Peahend, and Cleek-im-in, to Broxburn. I wonder if you call to mind a little clump of woods that used to be on that corner. The trees were thick and dark, mostly spruce and pine, and a great place for cushie's nests. There was always a deathly silence in the place, which in my day was kent as "The Bullet". There were three of us, and we would "dreip the dyke" timidly, and would scout, and crawl in the Feinmore Cooper style, all over the place to make sure there were no dummy-doctors, or other hostiles lying in wait for us. What fun we used to have playing Indians, and when it was cut down to add to the tillage our hearts were nigh unto the breaking. In

fact even now, there are times I think of its cool shade and quiet, and regret it's being cut down. It was on such excursions that we saw and heard the larks, and we would watch them till out of sight, just exactly as you describe. It is all so simple, but realistic. You speak of Belhaven. My few short years of happiness were spent there, and the Saturdays were divided between the country, and the sea. It was not all play, for I had to gather driftwood at the sea for the house, as no wood was ever bought. Then with a wheelbarrow I would go sometimes as far as Wester Broomhouse, to get the horse manure on the roads for the garden. There would be days I would be forbidden to leave the garden, but, well you have described it all, not forgetting the leatherins. Just a word

California is a "far cry" for me and probably I shall never see it. For I am only a humble "workie" and have to face the stey brae with as much contentment as I can. I love to travel, it is in the blood, and there are better days, when everything goes wrong, and I would gladly leave all this so-called civilization astern. But I am in the upper forties, and must think about conserving the finances, against the unproductive days that will surely come if I live. And when I have had shekels, my face was always turned hameuards and.

My thoughts will wake and glide
To harbour-lights, and boyhood's mirth,
And quays that skirt a Northern firth,
And ships that wait the tide."

But anyhow I keep up the hope that I may see the Auld Toon again.

my way home from the shop I would ring Macfarlane's bell and dart for home. Last year a friend of mine moved in there, and I wrote inquiring if the old bell handle was still there. She replied, saying it is still there, and added "Michty! laddie what gar'd ee think o' sic a thing as that." But as Friend Ogilvie says, "Perhaps it is always the first vivid scene impressed on a boy's mind that stays with him clearly to the end". Vandals have descended on Belhaven in these later days. The birk tree, that you see over inside the dyke, behind the letter box, has been felled as "an improvement". The wee hoose, at the milestane once occupied by Matthie Watt, purveyor of treacle buns, (black and white) and gundy, has been torn down, and a

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thing called a "Lodge" erected. All this last year by some "incomer" an' I'm wae for the place. I hate to see the old landmarks torn down, but mayle after all perhaps I have no taste, no ambition. I presume that you saw the cut of the Old Castle and New Harbour in the Atlantic Monthly, in connection with "The Gateway of Scotland"?. I have got the book but have only had time to glance at it. There are a lot of familiar names in it, and I think it will be interesting. There is one Will H. Ogilvie who writes in the Scots-man, one of our nature lovers. I have a book of his poems, and cuttings of various prose articles. One of his works is called "Life in the Open". I haven't seen it but I came across an extract from it which I saved, and I have taken

the liberty to send you a typed copy. As I read it it brought to mind Geordie Hogg, ploughman at Winterfield Mains, ploughing in the field between Belhaven Toll and the Railway. The gulls too, were there, and a happy barefit callant who waited impatiently for lowsin time, so he could get a ride on the back o' the ither horse. Now Mr Muir it is 4½ years since you last wrote me and much water has flowed down the Broxburn since. At that time you kindly invited me to visit you, if I ever came to California, for which I thank you, and should I ever be there, you will be the first person I will hunt up. I didn't reply, for I realise you are a busy man and have lots to take up your time without me making demands on you.

pleasure to watch the familiar stars, come up and cross overhead, and if out in the evening I always look up and get a wink from them. Now I will gather together the enclosures, and post card, and hope you will be spared to write us many more delightful articles. With best wishes too, for continued pilgrimages into the open.

Yours very truly
John G. Manuel.

I trust you will not be bored with this rambling screed, but I just had to write to tell you that there is at least one Scot who treasures your articles, and may I say that the last one is just as interesting as the first. I began this letter two nights ago, and in the interim I have received from a literary friend a most interesting clipping from the Transcript. From it I learn that on the 21st inst. you will pass the 75th milestone of the pilgrimage. There are very few in these United States, hailing from the old town that "stands red and royal in the sun", that will write you on your anniversary. So, as a fellow townsman, I send you my hearty congratulations on the day, and may you be spared to see as many as you care to. I feel honoured,

and it is an honour to our name
toon, that you lived and enjoyed
all these happy, precious years in
the open, and that you have written
of this old world, and passed it on
to benefit and cheer thousands of
less favoured ones, who love the open,
but are compelled to stay within
sight of sunbaked blocks, walk on
heated tar streets, and listen to
discordant jangle of telephone bells,
and sundry other inconveniences of
commercialism. No doubt you too
have had your trials and sorrows, no
one escapes those, but I cannot but
help thinking that you have had a
happy life, wandering where you
pleased, and listening to the voices
of the silence. Surely you must be
well content. Somewhere I read
that a friend of the late Lord

Kelvin, asked him shortly before his
death, how he summed up the
achievements of his life, and his
reply was one word "Failure". I
have quoted that several times and
then ash. If Lord Kelvin, with his
compass, sounding lead, and other
inventions, and a life crammed with
delving, sums it all up as "failure",
what of us ordinary toiling grubbers?
Or is it the case that the deeper
great men delve, the more dissatisfied
they become? Thomas Carlyle went
out, lamenting his lack of knowledge
of the stars, and I oftimes think
that entire satisfaction is only a
theory after all. And so I have
part compensation in knowing a
few of the stars that Carlyle did
not know. Sometimes I have to work
out-doors all night, and it is a

THE GULLS BEHIND THE PLOUGH.

When I was very,very young- a bit laddie,in fact- I used to love more than anything else in life to toddle up and down beside the men who were ploughing. It seemed to me in those days a grand and desirable thing to grow up and drive two horses. I used to watch with wondering awe the great whitefaced Clydesdales as they lifted their feathered feet with slow and faultless rhythm,leaning into their collars with generous persistence,as they faced the curve of the brae. I loved to hear the ring of the taut chains, the tap of the heavy swingle-bars the whine of the share as it grated here and there over a stone,and the soft " slather " of the moist earth as it fell in a chocolate cascade over the mould-board; but better than all I loved the squawk of the hungry grey gulls as they flew overhead in white clouds of clamour,rising and settling,and rising again as the fresh furrow lengthened behind us. I knew where they lived in the spring and summer,my friends the seagulls,because once I had been taken up to look at the broad blue loch that lay in the bosom of the hills,wreathed round with purple heather,and I had been shown the island in this moorland mirror where they nested and fed their young,and I had seen them,thousands and thousands and grey thousands,wheeling over the blue water and crying into the wind. We had bonnier birds by far in Scotland,and many with sweeter voices,but none of them carried with them the scent of the newly-turned earth and the salt of the sea winds as the gulls did- my gulls that followed the plough. Perhaps it is always the first vivid scene impressed on a boy's mind that stays most clearly with him to the end. Whether that be true or not,when any-one names Scotland,at once memory holds up before me the same bright picture in the same frame of blue March sky- the big team drawing steadily,the old man stumbling between the handles of the plough,with one foot in the furrow and one foot on the lea,and behind and above him the grey mist of the gulls. What a team it was,and what a driver. " Co' 'way, Jean, lass. Co' 'way, wumman " he would call,every word a caress, to the big mare that,if she was lazy at times,was only so that she might have excuse for hearing the voice she loved. Then Clyde would turn his proud head and bite at Jean's bridle,resentful because he hadn't been included in the tender words. Then old Jimmy would look round and see me lagging behind. " Coom on,ma mannie. What ails 'ee? The burds 'll be takin' 'ee for a bit wurrm an' gobblin' 'ee up if 'ee dinna look shairp." But I knew better than that,and waved my little whip at the white flock squawking overhead. If it had been the old turkey gobbler in the stackyard I might not have been so brave. But the gulls were my friends,I had no fear of them. Old Jimmie the ploughman is dead,gone- over the last headland into the great Unfurrowed Lea. The whitefaced bays are buried- with the youth of the boy who followed them so lovingly- somewhere down by the burn in the shelter of the hawthorn hedge, and new horses and new men tramp from headrig to headrig along the remembered lands; but memory,whenever I hold out my hands to her,brings forward the fair old picture in its frame of blue,and when I listen very closely I can hear the grating of the ploughshare in the loam and the ceaseless chatter of the gulls as they circle overhead.--

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The annual meeting of Siddons Society was being held in the Corn Exchange. Mr Siddons himself was reading the financial statement, and all the transactions for the year. At the conclusion there was an oppressive silence, each one looking at his neighbour, expecting him to say something. Finally Mr Siddons said, " What is your pleasure with this report gentlemen?". Another period of suspense followed, which was at last broken by Bob Marr, fisherman, who sat up in the laft, gey fou, and deemed it incumbent on some one to say something, so he roars oot, " Juist read that ower again Maister Siddons!".

Three Dunbar worthies of the old seafaring school went on one of their cruises to Stirling. The craft they sailed was a lime sloop, Captain Jock MacByre. Jock was a big hairy man with a thunderous voice. Matthie Foster was mate, and was a wee bit o' a mannie, while the crew was yin Tam Pringle. On their return someone met Tam doon at the weathergless, and speired," Whatna kind o' a voyage did ee hae Tam"?. No sic a bad voyage, says Tam, but the Captain wis awfu' stuck up; he had tae hae a haill table tae himsel. The next question as to what constituted the food, elicited the reply that the diet for the haill cruise wis sheepsheid kail.

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